



GET TO KNOW **Mercy Chefs**

Mercy Chefs is a 501c3 founded in 2006 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The organization exists to provide professionally prepared, restaurant-quality meals to victims, volunteers, and first responders in natural disasters and national emergencies and partners with existing ministries with food service in underserved communities around the country.

Since Mercy Chefs' founding in 2006, we have served over twenty million meals in response to over 150 natural disasters in 29 states and 12 countries with the help of over 10,000 volunteers. The last three years have marked significant increase for Mercy Chefs. The pandemic brought a new set of challenges nationwide for people facing food insecurity. Mercy Chefs responded with the launch of our grocery box distribution program providing millions of meals monthly in addition to our existing disaster relief response and community kitchen outreach.

For every one person we feed, we learn of three more who are hungry. We know that we must do more. As the need continues to increase every day nationwide, Mercy Chefs is committed to expand to meet the needs of others. For more information, visit [MercyChefs.com](https://www.MercyChefs.com).

AREAS OF FOCUS:

Disaster Relief & Long-Term Recovery

We provide professionally prepared, restaurant-quality meals for victims, volunteers, and first responders in national emergencies and natural disasters. Our team is experienced in bringing relief following hurricanes, flooding, tornadoes, earthquakes, wildfires and national emergencies. Our mobile kitchens are self-sustaining, able to run in areas without power and capable of purifying their own water. This enables our team to bring relief even in the most inopportune of circumstances.

Community Kitchens

After working in disaster relief for several years, we recognized our responsibility to put our resources, volunteers, and skills to use outside of disasters to feed food-insecure populations across the nation. In 2019, Mercy Chefs launched its first permanent community kitchen in Portsmouth, VA as the model for a program that so far has been replicated in Nashville (TN), McAllen (TX), the Florida Panhandle, and Western Kentucky.

Food Insecurity Response

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, Mercy Chefs has delivered millions of meals through grocery box distribution across the nation. We see these needs continuing to grow. We're also finding new ways to support people in communities with job skills training, young-parent cooking classes, and family-budget recipe creation.



Chef Gary LeBlanc

After 35 years in the hotel restaurant business, Chef Gary LeBlanc unexpectedly discovered his passion while volunteering during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

As he describes it, he watched from his television in Portsmouth, Virginia as the hurricane hit his hometown of New Orleans. Seeing people he recognized standing on overpasses in hopes of being rescued and watching the report of his daughter's neighborhood, completely underwater, struck him in a way nothing had before. Immediately, he knew he had to help.

Gary volunteered with every agency he could find to do food service for those displaced by the hurricane. What he witnessed during his short-term volunteer experience compelled him to be a part of lasting impact in the field of disaster relief and ultimately changed the entire trajectory of his life. He describes it like this:

Katrina created a chaos that our country had never seen before: Americans fighting for their lives, city wide devastation, children without water and a public failure of our federal and state governments to respond. The community was in ruins and recovery seemed out of reach. It was there in the midst of the chaos that I realized the incredible difference that a hot meal can make, and at the same time, I was struck by the lack of care put into the relief meals.

In Cajun culture, food is love, and Gary grew up watching his Cajun grandmothers cook for every occasion and often for no reason at all. The contrast between his childhood experience and the food he saw being served to the victims of Hurricane Katrina shocked him. There was no love or passion being put into the meals. It was all about fast, cheap and mass quantity.





Months after returning to Virginia, broken by what he had witnessed in New Orleans, Gary was again moved to take action. He felt a personal call to, **just go feed people**. It seemed all of the years he had spent in the hospitality industry had been leading him to this moment. Gary became inspired by the possibility of serving restaurant quality meals to victims, first responders, and volunteers in a disaster zone on a mass scale.

In just a few months' time and with support and prayer from his wife, Gary turned his passion for feeding others into a humanitarian and disaster relief organization called, Mercy Chefs.

In the sixteen years since, Mercy Chefs has served over 20 million meals for victims, volunteers and first responders in natural disasters and national emergencies.

Mercy Chefs is constantly expanding across the United States and even internationally with relief aid, permanent kitchens, water projects, and community outreaches.

Gary puts it like this, "Every time I see a disaster strike around the world, it takes me back to Katrina, and I know I have to help. Something has to be done and I'm in a position to do it. So, I do."

Gary's entire family, including his wife, Mercy Chefs Co-Founder & President, Ann LeBlanc, is involved in Mercy Chefs in one way or another, and he has taken great pride in watching his children develop compassion for others through service. When he is not working, Gary loves spending his time with his five children and five grandchildren.



Additional Resources

Along with visiting our website, mercychefs.com, to learn more about who we are, what we do, and how to get involved, please visit our [Facebook](#) page for the most up-to-date information on our deployments and day-to-day activities.

Also, check out our [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts.

[Mercy Chefs Quarterly Newsletter](#)

VIDEOS:

[The Birth of Mercy Chefs](#)

[15 Years of Mercy Chefs](#)

[Mercy Chefs Youtube Channel](#)

PHOTOS:

[Best of Mercy Chefs](#)

Please reach out to megan@mercychefs.com with any questions.